

**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515**

**STATEMENT OF
THE HONORABLE ENI F.H. FALEOMAVAEGA
CHAIRMAN**

**before the
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ASIA, THE PACIFIC AND THE
GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT**

“Thailand: The Path Toward Reconciliation”

June 10, 2010

For over five years, the Thai people have seen their country embroiled in political strife principally, but not exclusively, between two groups: the Yellow Shirts and the Red Shirts. The tension between the previous government of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and the Yellow Shirts led to a military coup in 2006 and the exile of Mr. Thaksin.

After one year of rule by an interim government established by the coup, control of the country reverted to a democratically-elected government. But the political strife continued, peaking with the recent Red Shirt anti-government demonstrations in Bangkok that left over 80 people dead.

The bloodshed and ongoing instability are a cause for concern for the United States as well as for Thailand's many other friends around the world. Although relative calm has returned to Bangkok in recent days, most of the contentious issues remain unresolved. Indeed, the recent riots and crackdowns appear to have deepened divisions within Thai society. A process of reconciliation must be reinvigorated promptly or tensions will remain, and the risk of further violence and instability will grow.

I honestly believe the five-point plan, proposed by Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva in early May of this year, provided the right starting point for such a process. The plan called on all parties to uphold the monarchy, to resolve fundamental problems of social justice, to ensure that the media could operate freely and constructively, to create an independent committee to investigate casualties of the recent crackdowns and to carry out political reforms resulting in fresh elections. The plan formed the most pragmatic and plausible path toward an amicable return to stability, democracy and the rule of law.

And just today, in a nationwide telecast, Prime Minister Abhisit called on all Thais to participate in the five-point plan for reconciliation. As a start, a ceremony involving five religious faiths was held this morning. The Prime Minister also asked leaders across the spectrum to gather opinions over the next two weeks on how best to implement the roadmap through meetings the Prime Minister and his cabinet would facilitate. In addition, he announced that a committee for a review of the constitution was being formed, and next week, the government would organize an assembly of three agencies – the National Economic and Social Development Board, National Health Insurance Board and the Thai Health Promotion Foundation – to gather opinions on how to solve the problem of social disparities.

Thailand has gone through political crises in the past, including the Black May Crisis of 1992, the student massacre at Thammasat University in 1976 and the student uprising of 1973. What we have witnessed over the past three months, however, exceeds all of these in terms of those injured and killed as well as in the depth of the societal fissures underlying the crisis. There is no doubt that Thailand has entered a critical period, one that could determine the direction of the country for years to come.

Clearly, the conflict in Thailand is an internal issue, and only the Thai people and their leaders can chart their way toward its resolution. Yet, as a close friend of Thailand, we should stand by the country during this difficult period and encourage the Thai government and the people of Thailand to move toward reconciliation and the rule of law. It was with those views in mind that I introduced H. Res. 1321 last month, expressing the sense of the House of Representatives that the political situation in Thailand be solved peacefully and through democratic means. While that resolution has yet to advance, on May 24, 2010, the Senate introduced and adopted S. Res. 538, which was based on the H. Res. 1321 and which expressed precisely the same position.

I continue to believe that the House should pass its own resolution due to the importance of the bilateral relationship. Indeed, our long history of friendship gained official sanction in 1833 when Thailand became the first treaty ally of the United States in the Asia Pacific region. In recent decades, we have strengthened our ties through the military alliance we forged in 1954, our designation of Thailand as a major non-NATO ally in 2003 and Thailand's valued contributions of troops and support to U.S. military operations in Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan and Iraq.

When I served during the Vietnam War, I directly saw the enormous contributions made by the Thai people. I experienced what it meant to have a friend along in our efforts as Thailand was one of our most important allies in the effort. On behalf of our country, I want to say how grateful we are for all that Thailand did during that period – and before and after – as a close friend and ally of the United States.

Thailand is also a major trading partner of the United States, a regional leader, a force for stability in Southeast Asia and a country with which we share common values and interests. The United States has always appreciated Thailand's many international contributions, and we respect and admire its unique culture.

Just prior to this hearing, His Excellency, Mr. Kiat Sittheeamorn, Special Envoy of the Prime Minister of Thailand, met with Members of the Foreign Affairs Committee and gave a first-hand account of the issues confronting Thailand. The crisis is complex and multidimensional, one that involves political conflicts, economic tensions, social rifts and personal enmities. Fortunately, we have with us today the right people to help us understand the problems facing the country and to offer their thoughts on how the United States can best support Thailand.